



## Angel Salsbach shares his trial and triumph with the Antillean community

Astrid Britten, Director of the Biblioteca Nacional, was happy to receive a copy of “Dromen in het Woud” (Dreaming in the Woods) by author Angel Salsbach of Curacao on Wednesday evening, June 16. The presentation was accompanied by the music of noted musicians Delbert Bernabela on the saxophone and Johnny Schaarbai playing piano.

The gift of this book to Aruba’s library was particularly poignant, as the subject of the book is Mr. Salsbach’s struggle to recover and regain his faculties after a devastating brain hemorrhage that left him paralyzed on his right side. This happened in September of 2001, at the age of sixty-five, and his book is a message of determination and hope, which he published with the thought that it would inspire others who may suffer the same debilitating cerebral damage. A common affect from such an event is Aphasia, and Angel lost the capacity of speech, reading, object recognition; “I lost everything,” as he describes it.

Angel Salsbach keenly felt this loss of his mental faculties, as before he was a renowned intellectual. An engineer by education, he was an author, teacher, member of the Curacao Parliament, and had served as Lieutenant Governor of Curacao. For such a person to find themselves as a child is not only physically but also emotionally devastating, and he began expressing his feelings by writing, though he could not understand anything he had written. Noted Aruban psychologist Dr. Melva Croes-Yanez describes this syndrome as “Pure Word Blindness,” not uncommon in such cases. Dr. Croes-Yanez also presented an informative lecture on the syndrome and its consequences for the gathering at the library, which was attended not only by many friends and by fans of Angel’s writing, but also those that are concerned about mental disabilities due to aging.

Acting as host for the evening was Carissa Isings, who considers Angel Salsbach her “true father” and assisted him in the writing of his book, as he could not read it to edit it. Initially he wrote a book in Papiamento titled “Skirbi sin por Lesa” (Writing Without Being Able Read) which Carissa reports was “emotionally devastating” as at that time, Angel expressed much of his despair, frustrations and fears at never regaining his faculties. Fluently multilingual, he found his native language of Papiamento was the first to return, and after that Dutch, which is the language of his second book. On Wednesday, he was able to converse easily in English, and he reports that his Spanish is now returning also.

“Dromen in het Woud” was written after long sessions with physical and speech therapists. Carissa expressed that it is much lighter than his Papiamento book, with humor and nostalgia, as the belief that he would recover tempered Angel’s feelings. Irais Sankatsing of the Arubiana Department of the library read a passage of the book to the gathering before it was officially presented to Astrid Britten. Afterwards, Angle entertained the gathering by jamming with the musicians on the Bass Fiddle, as he spent many years with various jazz groups, and he expressed that the retention of his musical abilities helped him through the desperate times. Afterwards, he and his wife Aida entertained questions from the audience about their experience, and their triumph over adversity, in the hope, along with his book that it will inspire others to “Never give up!”